



Children's Developmental Stages and Reactions to Suicide

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When talking with children it is important to use appropriate language. Children thrive when given reasonable information; too much information will only confuse them and create anxiety. Ask children questions in order to assess their knowledge level. Encourage them to talk openly and ask questions.

A child or adolescent may have a multitude of feelings or he/she may not feel anything at all. Whatever your child is feeling remember your role, as an adult, is to help.

Under Two Years Old

- Do not understand what death/suicide is
- Sense the feelings of adults
- Depend on non-verbal communications (Need physical care, affection and reassurance)

Three—Five Years Old

- View death as being temporary
- Question cause of death
- May feel the death of a loved one is a punishment
- Feel Sadness
- Regressive behaviors
- Increased aggression
- Idealize the deceased person
- Give up attachment to deceased person: attach to substitute people (teacher, neighbor, etc.)
- Escape into play, at times, to relieve themselves of reality; seem not to react to the death
- Need reassurance, love, care, honesty, daily routine, and structure

Five-Ten Years Old

- Fear death of self and others
- Feel anger and guilt (blames self for the suicide)
- Have difficulty expressing feelings in words
- Express feelings better through behavior, or aggressiveness as a defense against feeling helpless
- Ask concrete questions
- Identify with the deceased as a means of holding on to him/her
- Withdrawal from discussing the death with the family and denial of being concerned about the death due to fear of upsetting the surviving relatives

Ten-Eighteen Years Old

- Recognize irreversible nature of suicide
- May be troubled about own death
- May experience denial (try not to think about it; don't want to talk about it)
- Fear of future
- Hid feelings
- May feel anger, repress sadness, be depressed
- May have physical complaints
- Religious beliefs are questioned
- Inability to concentrate due to preoccupation with the loss and nature of the loss
- Wishing to be with the deceased and possible thoughts of own death